Battle Lab NCOs

Carrying the Army into the 21st Century

By SFC Donald L. Terry

The role of NCOs continues to evolve along with the changing face of warfare. Even as training facilities shrink in number, they expand in scope, efficiency and size as NCOs take up the challenge of greater leadership responsibilities. And the Army's Battle Labs are where NCOs are experimenting with and developing technologies and capabilities that will carry the Army beyond the 20th century.

NCOs are playing greater roles at the Army's six main and two associated Battle Labs.

The emphasis at one of the associated labs—the Battle Command Lab at Ft. Huachuca—is on optimizing a commander's access to and use of intelligence. NCOs play key roles in the lab's unique initiatives because of their military intelligence skills as well as diversified experiences in training, combat experience, leadership, etc.

1SG Douglas Striffolino exemplifies that diversity. Now a first sergeant of an Intelligence Center and School training company, he was a former NCOIC of Ft. Huachuca's Battle Lab.

"The Army has a new perspective on how to conduct intelligence operations. The new military intelligence doctrine is drastically changing to support and keep pace with global political and economic advances," Striffolino says.

"Battle Lab NCOs are in the thick of change and, through continuous coordination and training, they're making a difference in the support provided to field units. Unlike other Battle Labs, the Ft. Huachuca Battle Lab has gone to the field and pulled the people that make it happen: NCOs. NCOs provide a perspective that the vice director sought when this Battle Lab was officially activated in 1994," he adds.

Striffolino says new systems being developed reflect new Army doctrine, but that mastering these systems to create a digitized battlefield that supports a quick and lethal power-projection force is the greatest challenge.

In addition to systems, he adds that doctrine also supports new intelligence reports, techniques and software being developed by other commands to integrate intelligence information both horizontally across the Battlefield Operating Systems and vertically between national and tactical commands.

NCOs at Ft. Huachuca's Battle Lab play a vital role in supporting daily operations, to include planning, coordinating and executing high-visibility concept demonstrations. That role isn't lost on CPT Stephen C. Wong, until recently the lab's Deep Operations officer. "It's a known fact that NCOs have the technical depth and insight in the development of concepts and integration technology, due to the fact that they are executors versus planners," Wong explains.

"The impact on what NCOs and soldiers do in the field is essential to the actual application of what Battle Labs are all about," Wong says. "The principal goals of Battle Labs are to collect ideas, concepts, and technology, conduct analysis, implement in a real environment with real soldiers, modify if necessary, and implement. NCOs and soldiers must evaluate and provide insights in relation to capabilities available with prototype systems and doctrine."

The lab's NCOIC of the Battle Technology Laboratory, MSG Beth Moore, agrees. "I think you lose sight of reality if you do not include the basic worker in the testing, evaluation and development phases. And your officer is not your basic worker; that is not his job," Moore says.

The intelligence analyst adds: "Officers don't always sit down and do the nuts and bolts of the analysis and oftentimes they lose sight of exactly what it takes for the analyst to do his job to produce a product."

Many NCOs at the Huachuca Battle Lab manage administration, training and logistical needs, and serve as central points of contact for supporting assigned and attached personnel. They establish, maintain and resolve conflict in long-range and short-range calendars, operate and troubleshoot systems and brief senior Army leadership. NCOs also provide support to action officers in plan-

A soldier monitors a ground control station receiving transmissions from a Joint Surveillance Target Acquisition Radar System. External pilots (right) handle take-off and landing responsibilities during an exercise at Fort Huachuca Battle Lab.

U.S. Army photo

ning and coordinating all Army Chief of Staff Advanced Warfighting Experiments and proof-of-concept demonstrations, serve as primary action officers for Intelligence and Electronic Warfare integration projects and provide technical advice to action officers.

Experience and technical skills are mutually rewarding benefits that NCOs bring to the Battle Lab. Moore says this equates to working on the "nitty gritty testing and evaluation side...being there and working with the equipment and working with the development with the soldiers in the field.

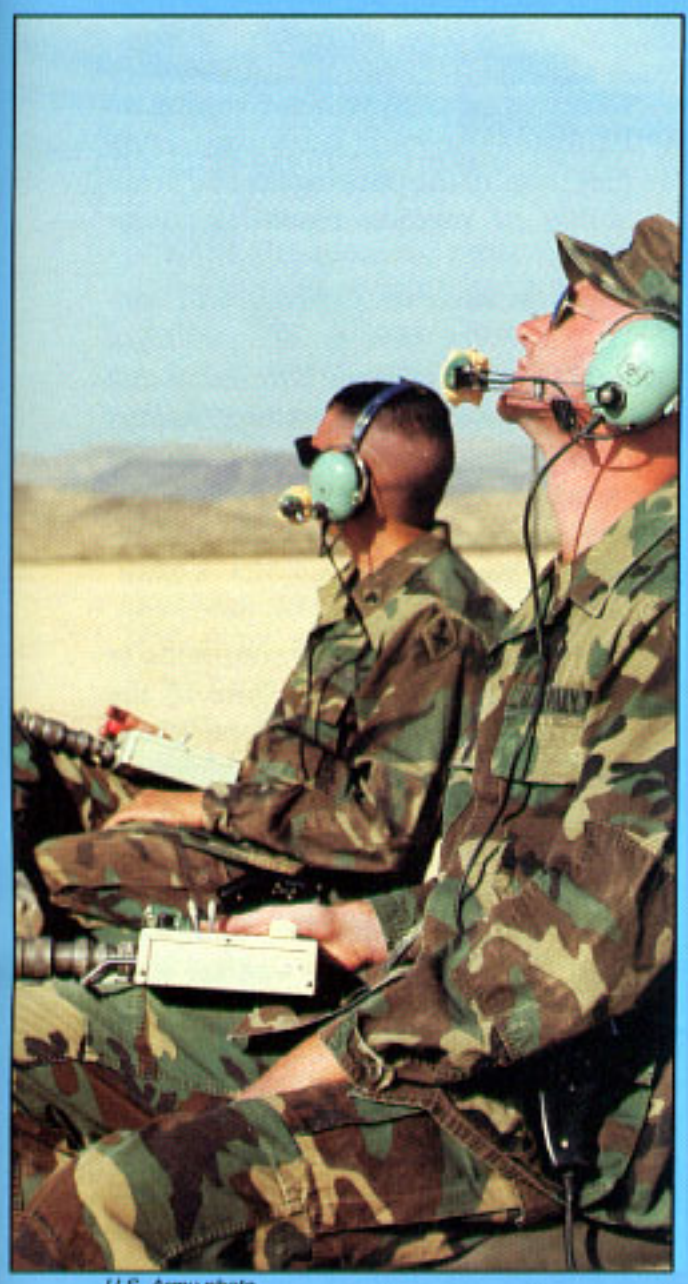
"It's not enough to have officers with field experience," Moore asserts. "You need the enlisted who actually push the buttons, cable-connect it, do the communications, and [you need them] to be actively involved in the development and testing to give a true evaluation from a worker bee's standpoint if you're going to field something that is usable by the individual soldier."

"I think you lose sight of reality if you do not include the basic worker in the testing, evaluation and development phases. And your officer is not your basic worker; that is not his job."

Since the Army's recent announcement that the 2nd Armored Div, based at Ft. Hood, TX, will be the main "Experimental Force," it will be the unit that will test field systems and other results of Battle Labs, where hands-on evaluation will provide critical feedback.

Battle Lab NCOs are working with technology and providing hands-on insight to provide soldiers and commanders with what they need on tomorrow's battlefield. "Hopefully, we're making a product that they see as fitting their needs—more user-friendly from the standpoint of training and having to use the system," Moore says. That means a product that "the soldier needs and asks for...what the commander needs and asks for." ■

Terry is the Public Affairs NCO for the Battle Command Battle Lab, Ft. Huachuca, AZ.



U.S. Army photo

The Army's Battle Labs Mission: Experiment...Maintain Battlefield Edge

The Army created Battle Labs in 1992 with a mission to "experiment with changing methods of warfare...to ensure that future generations of soldiers and leaders will have the same battlefield edge that was held in Desert Storm and other recent operations," according to GEN Frederick M. Franks Jr. (Ret), former commander of the Training and Doctrine Command.

"Battle Laboratories...(are) a place where we can examine ideas, concepts of warfare, and then harness those to the means of warfare. Ask the questions, do the experimentation..." Franks adds.

These unique labs have a somewhat contradictory mission of experimenting with realistic, live, tactically competitive environments, while also "designed" to accept "failure"—or at least support trying new and different experiments that further ideas but might never materialize into concepts and systems that are adopted.

Battle Labs employ advanced simulation and communications technologies to link together combat developers, materiel developers, industry and field soldiers during the requirements definition phase of development. They use information age approaches to conduct Advanced Warfighting Demonstrations that test concepts in competitive combat arms experiments.

There are six main Battle Labs and two associated labs in the Army. The Combat Service Support Lab is at Ft. Lee, VA. The Early Entry Lethality and Survivability Battle Lab is at Ft. Monroe, VA. Ft. Sill, OK, is home to the Depth and Simultaneous Attack Battle Lab. The Mounted Battle Space Battle Lab is at Ft. Knox, KY. The Dismounted Battle Space Battle Lab is at Ft. Benning, GA.

The sixth Battle Command Lab at Ft. Leavenworth, KS, has two associated labs: Ft. Gordon, GA, is home to the communications element and Ft. Huachuca, AZ, is home to the intelligence element. ■